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PUBLIC OFFENCES, OR CHURCH DISCIPLINE :

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NO. I.

"Now, I beseech you, brethren, mark them which cause divisions and offences, contrary to the doctrine which ye have learned, and avoid them : for they that are such serve not our Lord Jesus Christ."—ROM. XVI: 17, 18.

In a former discourse, we labored to show the distinction between public and private offences; and we hope we were not unsuccessful in explaining the divine law in relation to those who have trespassed against us, in our private capacity. The offence was between us as individuals, and we had the right, nay, it was our duty, to settle the matter between ourselves. We may not, until every other expedient has failed, introduce it before the public. To bring it into the church, is the very last resort. The language of the "Baptist Confession of Faith" is, "should any private matter be brought into the church, before the previous steps (described in Matt. xviii,) have been taken, the person that brings it in ought to be severely reproved and admonished, and that publicly, before the whole church, for his irregular and injurious conduct therein,"* (p. 221.) "Let all things be done decently and in order."

Having, therefore, disposed of private offences, we shall in this, and the following discourse, invite your attention to those that are public. To such, our text has allusion.

"Now, I beseech you, brethren, mark them which cause

* "The Baptist Confession of Faith." This volume, of about 300 pages, was first adopted in London, A. D. 1699 : and afterwards by the Charleston Association, S. C., A. D. 1831 ; and as a summary of 'Faith and Practice,' may be said to represent the views of the Baptist churches generally : although neither this, nor any other confession or formula, is considered binding on the conscience of any, the Bible being the only acknowledged standard.

divisions and offences, contrary to the doctrine which ye have learned, and avoid them: for they that are such serve not our Lord Jesus Christ." Or to use the paraphrasis of the learned and pious Dr. Scott, on this place: "those persons must be marked with decided disapprobation and avoided, who aim to prejudice believers against each other,—to draw them off from faithful pastors,—or to seduce them into strange doctrines and practices, contrary to the simple truths of God's word."

The discipline of the church, in primitive times, was exceedingly strict. In the estimation of the apostle, who was inspired to prescribe rules for the regulation of the house of God, it was a sufficient ground of excommunication, that a member was the cause of dissensions and factions in the church: or that his deportment was calculated to bring scandal and reproach upon the cause of the Redeemer. Nor could it have been otherwise with him, who charged it, as a crime, upon the Jews, that "the name of God had been blasphemed through them." He who taught others, must needs teach himself. He who blamed the Jewish church for so acting as to bring dishonor upon the divine glory, could not allow such conduct in christian churches, as would cause the name, and "the way of Christ to be evil spoken of."

In the apocalyptic vision, the Spirit said to the Ephesian church, by way of commendation, "thou canst not bear them which are evil." (Rev. ii: 2.) This was honor enough for one church: and it formed a striking contrast to the rebuke which the same spirit administered to the church at Pergamos. "I have a few things against thee, because thou hast them there which hold the doctrine of Balaam, who taught Balak to cast a stumbling-block before the children of Israel, and to eat things sacrificed unto idols, and to commit fornication. So hast thou also them that hold the doctrine of the Nicolaitanes, which things I hate." (v. 14, 15.) In this church were some base, mercenary souls,—of a covetous, temporizing spirit, similar to ancient Balaam, who, for the sake of gain, did not scruple to sacrifice the best interests of the people of God. Also, were retained in the communion, some, who, under the notion of "christian liberty," did not hesitate to run into licentious indulgences—a set of anti-nomians, who "despised all rules and all au-

thority"—or to use a modern phrase, who, because "they were free, claimed the privilege to do just as they pleased." The retention of such characters in the church, the Son of God said, "I hate." "Such serve not our Lord Jesus Christ." "Wherefore," said he, "repent, (that is, reform, turn them out,) or else I will come unto thee quickly, and will fight against them with the sword of my mouth."

It is a striking fact, which has doubtless occurred to every one familiar with ecclesiastical history, that the periods of the declension of *pure and vital religion* in the church, in all ages, and in all countries, have been characterized by a corresponding laxness in discipline; and that the revival of religion, has been similarly characterized by a revival of the wholesome discipline which God has instituted for the government of his house. An example of this, worthy of attention, is recorded by Milner, the historian, in relation to the condition of the church in the third century. "It deserves to be remarked," says he, "that *the first grand and general declension*, after the primary effusion of the divine Spirit, should be fixed about the middle of this century." (Vol. 1, p. 165.) The cause of this declension, was the neglect of church discipline, as the Decian persecution was esteemed by Cyprian to be its chastisement. Cyprian was elected bishop of Carthage, A. D. 248. He found the church, at that time, in a wretchedly lapsed and declining condition; and in a treatise concerning the lapse, he said: "If the cause of our miseries be investigated, the cure may be found. The Lord would have his family to be tried. And *because long peace had corrupted the discipline divinely revealed to us*, the heavenly chastisement hath raised up our faith, which had almost lain dormant: and when, by our sins, we had deserved to suffer still more, the merciful Lord hath so moderated all things, that the whole scene rather deserves the name of a trial, than a persecution." (Ib. p. 165.) Here was the cause of the persecution; and here the consequences of inattention to the discipline of the church. Let it be neglected, and a blighting and a mildew will result, which will not fail, ere long, to induce the divine judgment upon us.

If, therefore, the apostolic injunction—if the authority of the Son of God—if the testimony of ecclesiastical history—if all these together, have any weight—then, by them,

"I beseech you, brethren, mark them which cause divisions and offences, contrary to the doctrine which ye have learned, and avoid them: for they that are such serve not our Lord Jesus Christ."

We propose, in this discourse, to describe the characters whom the scriptures represent as public offenders; and in the next, to inquire what discipline the scriptures prescribe for such.

I. We are to describe the characters whom the scriptures represent as public offenders. In the text, a general description of two classes of these, is specified: those who produce anti-scriptural schisms in the church, and those who occasion scandal to the cause of Christ. "Mark them which cause divisions and offences, contrary to the doctrine which ye have learned."

1. *Captious and contentious persons cause divisions contrary to the gospel.* "Now the end of the commandment is charity out of a pure heart, and of a good conscience, and faith unfeigned: from which *some* having swerved, *have turned aside unto vain jangling*, desiring to be teachers of the law; understanding neither what they say, nor whereof they affirm." "If any man consent not to wholesome words, even the words of our Lord Jesus Christ, and to the doctrine which is according to godliness, he is proud, knowing nothing, but *dotting about questions and strifes of words*, whereof cometh envy, strife, railings, evil surmisings, perverse disputings—from such withdraw thyself." 1 Tim. i: 5—ib. vi: 4, 5.

Seest thou a man heady and high-minded? Seest thou one who refuseth to submit to the authority of the great body? Seest thou one whose whole spirit and deportment are an everlasting protest against the decisions of the majority? One who loveth to have the pre-eminence in all things, who would sooner rend the peace of the whole body, than yield the most trifling matter? Such an one causeth division, contrary to the doctrine which ye have learned.

The entire spirit and letter of the sacred volume, so far as relates to the demeanor of christians, is that of mutual forbearance, concession and submission. In all questions of mere opinion and education—of mere policy and custom—of mere pleasure and expediency—in all questions *where it is perfectly immaterial to our innocence which side we*

adopt: as whether we eat one thing or another—whether we follow one fashion or any other, in our dress—whether we worship God in a finely finished house or a log cabin—whether we adopt one mode or any other in the defrayment of our church expenses—whether we assemble on Saturday or any other day, for the transaction of the business of the church—in all such questions as these, *the law of charity*, and the *voice of the majority*, are to be the rule: and any dissension from this, which is persisted in to the grief and annoyance of the body, is a violation of the principles which Christ has laid down for the regulation of his church. Yes, we repeat it, to adopt any indifferent opinion or practice: that is, any opinion or practice which we may either hold or let alone, and still be innocent, and to maintain and pursue this, to the pain and injury of the church, is not only an infringement of the laws of republicanism, which the Bible teaches, but is in fact a sin against Christ. “Let not him that eateth despise him that eateth not; and let not him which eateth not, judge (or condemn) him that eateth.” “But if thy brother be grieved with thy meat, now walkest thou not charitably.” “It is good neither to eat flesh, nor drink wine, nor any thing whereby thy brother stumbleth or is offended, or is made weak.” “When ye sin so against the brethren, and wound their weak consciences, ye sin against Christ.” “Let nothing be done through strife or vain glory, but in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than himself.” “Submit yourselves one to another, in the fear of the Lord.” “But if any man seem to be contentious, we have no such custom, neither the churches of God.” (Rom. xiv: 3, 15, 21—1 Cor. viii: 12—Phil. ii: 3—Eph. v: 21—1 Cor. xi: 16.)

2. There is a class of persons, a little dissimilar from these, whom, for the sake of distinction, we denominate, factious. *All factious persons cause divisions, contrary to the gospel.*

The distinction which we draw between a “captious” and a “factious” person, is this: The one is a man of mere prejudices and prepossessions—the other is a man of party. The one would exclude himself from the society of the faithful, on account of some favorite notion of his own—the other would lead away as many as possible with him. To the latter, allusion is made in the Acts of the Apostles,

(xx: 29, 30,) in these strong and impressive words: "I know, that after my departure, shall grievous wolves enter in among you, not sparing the flock. Also of your own selves shall men arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away disciples after them." Not satisfied to occupy their position alone, they will lead away captive as many souls as may fall under their influence. They are men of sour and bitter spirit, and who strive to infuse the same malaria into other hearts also. Their work is discord; and unless restrained, they will diffuse "the leaven of malice and wickedness into the whole lump." Unless suppressed, their evil communications will corrupt the entire body.

Perhaps a faithful minister is the object of their malignancy. In this event, nothing will escape their observation, which may serve to destroy his influence—render useless his preaching—or weaken the force of his example. Haman like, nothing can satisfy their hatred, until they have alienated all hearts, and even compelled the removal of the man of God. Their distempered senses can see nothing good in his best example, nor hear any thing good in his soundest doctrine. Like certain contemptible birds, they pass over all that is sound and wholesome, and alight only on such putrid matter as best suits a vitiated appetite. Ever seeking occasion, they delight to turn all hearts from the truths of his lips. To such, the rebuke of St. Paul, to Elymas, the sorcerer, is not too severe: "O full of all subtilty and all mischief, thou child of the devil, thou enemy of all righteousness, wilt thou not cease to pervert the right ways of the Lord." (Acts, xiii: 10.)

Perhaps the wholesome discipline of the church is the object of their rage. It may have fallen on them, as a chastisement of their own wrongs: or it may have touched some favorite friend. In either event, their malignant spirit is aroused, as the lion in his den, and nothing can be satisfactory but vengeance, wreaked in the injury of the church. They can see no reason—no justice—no religion, in the act. Their discontent is hastily communicated from soul to soul. They devise mischief on their bed; when they awake, they execute it. A faction to rescind that act, is the object; and partly of weak members, and partly of men of the world, a faction, if possible, they will create, and labor to reverse the decision, at least in public sentiment. No expe-

dient, that can be of the least avail, will be left untried, to rend the peace of Zion, or to stain the fair escutcheon of the church with disgrace.

My brethren, do not imagine that such men are the creatures of our idle fears. Would to God this were so! Would to God this had always been so! If you have no such characters among you at present, you know not how long it shall be e're such may arise. *We* have seen the church of God bleeding at every pore, under the ungodly deeds of such ungodly hands. *We* have seen the pious and faithful ministry crippled and cut down by such men. *We have* seen the unity and the peace of God's house laid waste by such unhallowed influence. Need you, then, be told that such may arise again? Need you be told that they are grievous and dangerous wolves? Need you be told that you should strictly mark and avoid them? "Of your own selves may men arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away disciples after them." To retain such perverse speakers in the bosom of the church—to lend the weight of your fellowship to their pernicious course, is to be partaker of their sin. No, my brethren; mark them who cause such divisions, contrary to the gospel, and avoid them.

But were we to confine this caution to those who are, or have been, members of the same church with yourselves, perhaps we should be unfaithful, both to you and to the sense of the Apostle. Perhaps he would have you cautioned against the unhallowed influence of those without your communion also, by whom it is attempted to alienate your hearts from the right way. If the Apostle said, that of your own selves would bad men arise to draw away many; he also said, that "grievous wolves would enter in among you, not sparing the flock." Against such you need to be admonished. For although they may not now infest your fold, you can never tell how soon they may do so. These are strange times on which we have fallen. The spirit of party is rife in the land; and it is the disgrace of the christian name, that it is so common in the church of God. Every year attests instances, in which, from motives of jealousy or suspicion, or dread, some faithful minister is publicly or privately abused—the church of God abused—members set against their pastor, or against each other, and eventually, the harmony, the strength, and the success of the

whole, impaired and destroyed. Mark those who perform such unholy deeds, and avoid them. "They zealously affect you but not well; yea, they would exclude you, that ye might affect them." (Gal. iv : 17.) It is not your good which such seek; it is not the good of your church which they seek. Yes, lay it down as a truth, when men whisper a word to the disparagement of the pastor of your church, when the drift of their words is to set brother at variance with brother, whatever may be their pretensions toward you or your church, they are insidious enemies to both. "Mark them and avoid them." But

3. Our text has reference to heretics. *Heretics cause divisions contrary to the gospel.* By a heretic in this place, we mean those who would subvert the well known and established doctrines and practices of the church.*

Every society of christians is formed upon the supposition of a certain unity, in regard to some leading points, both of faith and practice. "How shall two walk together, except they be agreed?" (Amos iii : 3.) And while, from the difference of education, and customs, and association, it can hardly be expected, that all should precisely agree in every little matter; yet, surely we have the right to expect those who connect themselves with our communion, to adopt all the leading, the essential and vital points, both of our practice and our doctrines. Has the blessed God laid down the same maxims for the whole human race—an innumerable multitude, and required all, upon the severest penalty, to adopt them? And shall not we require, at least those who connect themselves with our church, to adopt all the leading of those maxims? Surely this is not too much. "If then, any man come unto you and bring not this doctrine, receive him not into your house; neither bid him God speed." (2 John, 10.)

Let no man imagine that our peculiar form of government forbids us to say, what a man *shall hold*, and what he *shall not hold* to do. This is not so. True, ours is a republican form of government; and we rejoice—we boast in it. But is it any part of republicanism to have no laws—no system—

* "It is worthy of notice," says the excellent Rev. A. Fuller, "that the only passage in the New Testament, wherein heresy is introduced as an *object of discipline*, makes no mention of any thing, but *what relates to the principles of the party.*"—(Works, vol. ii : p. 465.)

no rule—no regulations? Or, to allow its laws and regulations to be disregarded? Our civil government is also republican: and if history is faithful, it was formed after the model of a Baptist church. But will any one say, it has no laws—no constitution defining the limits and powers of all the members of the great confederacy? That is not part of republicanism, allow us to say, where every man makes his own laws—where every man does just what he pleases—and where every man, whensoever it suits his private feelings, or his private interest, protests against the will and the voice of the majority. That is licentiousness—that is antinomianism—that is lawlessness—that is anarchy, confusion and misrule—that is what we have heard the Son of God say, “I hate.” No sirs. Republicanism is the peaceable submission of the minority, to the will of the majority—it is the government where the people, the great body of the people rule—where the wisdom of the mass is the standard*—where the many decide what is right, and where all, both the many and the few, adopt and do it. And as we say in civil matters, let that hand wither and die, which shall dare demolish a principle which the majority shall establish—let that tongue cleave to its jaws, which shall attempt to move against it—and let the man go a despised leper from the camps of the faithful, who shall presume to resist what the great body shall decree: so we say in ecclesiastical things, note that man, who, taking advantage of the republicanism of the church, shall claim the privilege to speak to the injury of its doctrines, or in contempt of its established practices. “Now, I command you, brethren, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye withdraw yourself from every brother that walketh disorderly, and not after the tradition which ye have received of us.” “As we said before, so say I now again, if any man preach any other gospel unto you, than that ye have received, let him be accursed.” (2 Thes. iii: 6—Gal. i: 9.)

Beloved brethren, I know not how I shall sufficiently impress this point upon your minds. If our mode of government does ~~not~~ in fact afford no plea for licentiousness, on

*It is evident, from the general tenor of this discourse, that the author does not intend to deny, that majorities in church, as in State, may err. In all such cases, redress is to be sought, constitutionally. A majority has no more right, than an individual, to oppress. Ed.

the one hand, it surely does lay us very liable to abuses, on the other. Under its wide waving banner, not a few find a crouching place, and sometimes to our injury; and nothing but your sleepless vigilance can protect the church, in the peaceable enjoyment of those "heaven born" doctrines and practices, which the Son of God bequeathed to us from the cross, as his last will and testament: and which apostles and martyrs have died to propagate. Innumerable multitudes find an asylum in the bosom of our Zion; and giving a loose rein to their heated imaginations, may gather up any set of whims and notions, and upon the broad basis of our republicanism, may claim the privilege to diffuse the poison of their dogmas. Nor are we wanting in striking examples of this. As there were false prophets in olden times—as there have been false teachers in our times—so there may arise "false teachers among you, who shall bring in damnable heresies, even denying the Lord that bought them, and bring upon themselves swift destruction: and many shall follow their pernicious ways, by reason of whom the way of truth shall be evil spoken of." (2 Pet. ii: 1, 2.) Shall we allow this? Surely it cannot be right to do so. Not right to allow men to think? We said no such thing. To think, is a right which heaven has bestowed on man, nor would we dispossess him of it. But because he has the right to think, has he the right to disturb others with his thoughts? Shall he be allowed to rend the peace of Zion, under the pretence of liberty? Man has the right to think, and to speak too, *what* he pleases; but he has not the right to speak *where* he pleases. The abolitionist has the right to think: but let him not think to the injury of the South. He has the right to speak: but let him not speak fire-brands into the civil and social institutions of whole communities. Let him think, and let him give utterance to his thoughts: but let him not impose them upon those who claim to be as enlightened and as liberal as himself. Let the heretic think and speak what he pleases: but will he demand our pulpits in which to do it? Will he require us to hear him? Will he ask the influence and authority of our communion, to give weight to his pernicious words? Surely he cannot ask all this.

Another thought presents itself here, which may well serve to impress upon your minds the importance of vigilance on

this subject: it is the present condition of our churches. Large multitudes are joining us every year; some from other societies, and some from the world. Many of these bring with them certain peculiarities, which we do not admit into our creed, and which would be fatal if they were admitted into it. Not a few of our members are but partially instructed—some of our ministry, either for the want of education, or time to devote to it, fail, sufficiently to expound and establish some of the leading points held by us—we have, comparatively, but a few copies of our “Confession of Faith,” where, in a small compass, an inquirer may learn what we hold, with the reasons of it—some there are who would destroy even those few: and from all these facts together, it must appear obvious that our whole body lies bare to heresies.* Every man reads for himself, (or rather, conjectures for himself, for few read sufficiently,) with scarcely the slightest aid, and with multitudes of prejudices and prepossessions upon him. Under such circumstances, what but the palpableness of our doctrines, together with the blessing of heaven upon us, can account for the fact, that we have not long since been riven to a thousand atoms? But, brethren, let us not presume too far upon the goodness of God.—“Let us watch diligently, lest any root of bitterness springing up, trouble us.” “An heretic, after the first or second admonition, reject.” “His words will eat as doth a canker.” “With good words and fair speeches, he will deceive the hearts of the simple.” “Many shall follow his pernicious ways, by reason of whom the way of truth shall be evil spoken of.” “Mark them which cause divisions and offences, contrary to the doctrine which ye have learned, and avoid them: they that are such serve not our Lord Jesus Christ.” (Heb. xii: 15—Tit. iii: 10—2 Tim. ii: 17—Rom. xvi: 18—2 Pet. ii: 2.

*The utter incompetency of written formularies, to secure denominational unity, is attested by universal experience. Within a few years past, the Presbyterians and the Methodists, in this country, have proved their inefficiency; and the Episcopal church, in England, is now passing through the same ordeal: while the Baptists in both hemispheres have been comparatively united, with the Bible alone as their umpire. But these instruments, in the sense of our author, may not only be harmless, but useful. The Baptist churches in Pennsylvania and South Carolina, with their Confessions, and those in Virginia and Kentucky, without them, are equally free, and equally united. Those put upon paper as statutes liable to be amended or abolished, what these class with the common law. Ed.

Permit us, beloved brethren, before we dismiss this branch of our discourse, to call up again, to your recollection, the positions we have assumed, and the declarations we have made. We said that *captiousness* should not be indulged in members of the church : and that however trifling or indifferent might be the requisition of the church, if its peace and happiness depend upon it, the law of charity requires each and all of its members to comply ; and that an obstinate refusal of any member to do so, would be censurable offence. We said also, that *factiousness* must be guarded against : and that in all or every instance, either in the church or out of it, that person must be “ marked ” and “ avoided,” who should labor to prejudice the members of a church against their pastor, or against each other. And, lastly, we said we should use all diligence to suppress any heresies that may appear among us, whether they respect our established usages, or our doctrines : that no confidence—no friendship which we may entertain for the person, the motive, or the ability of the offender, can justify a neglect of duty in these things.

II. Let us now proceed to the consideration of the *second* general description of offenders, specified in the text. They are such as bring scandal upon the cause of Christ. They are such as cannot be retained in the communion, but at the sacrifice of the reputation of the church. Whatever may seem to be the present and immediate bearings of such persons, on the cause of religion, they serve not our Lord Jesus Christ—their ultimate bearings are against christianity. The immediate and particular consequence of their retention, may be a larger number in the church, or some worldly influence to the denomination : but the general and remote consequence, will be the practical abolishment of the principle which requires all church members to live humbly, holily, and unblamably—to “ let their light so shine before men, that others may see their good works and glorify their father which is in heaven.” Therefore, mark them which cause offences, (scandals) also, contrary to the doctrine which ye have learned, and avoid them.

Under this general description, are included all those who openly and intentionally violate the principles contained in the decalogue. The ten commandments embrace all the fundamental articles of the moral government of God. They

are the basis—they are the rule and measure of all the moral and religious conduct in the universe. Hence they can never be abrogated. As a rule of action, they can never be abolished. Although the law is not the terms of salvation, still, all those who are redeemed, and those who are not, will be under perpetual obligation to observe it. Never can it be right to do what it forbids, or neglect to do what it requires. It can never be right to worship idols—to profane the name of God—to lie—to steal—to kill—to commit adultery—to desecrate the Sabbath—to covet that which belongs to another. These principles are equally binding on christians, as on others: and equally binding on all now, as though Jesus Christ had never come into the world to redeem mankind. No redemption price which heaven has bestowed on man—no price of redemption which heaven can bestow on man, can purchase for him the privilege to violate them. It were presumption—it is not piety, to say, that “inasmuch as we are not saved by works of the law, therefore we are under no obligation to keep the law.” To assume the liberty to sin, because “we are not under the law, but under grace,” is to “turn the grace of God into lasciviousness.” Shall we sin because grace hath abounded, or in order that grace may yet more abound? “This were iniquity to be reprovèd.”* “I have written unto you,” said

* “The ten commandments,” says a distinguished author, “being the substance of the law of nature, a representation of God’s image, and a beam of his holiness, behooved forever, unalterably, to be a rule of life to mankind in all possible states, conditions and circumstances. Whatever covenant was introduced, whether of works or of grace, or whatever form be put upon them, they behooved still to remain as a rule of life.” (Boston’s Works, p. 854.)

Says the learned and celebrated Vitringa: “When Paul affirms that believers, being under grace, ‘are free from the law,’ he must not be understood as asserting that they are loosed from obligation to observe the precepts which constitute the substance of those moral laws, which are contained in the writings of Moses.” (Observ. Sac. Tom. II, lvi. c. 18, §1.)

“If the moral law be not a rule of life to believers,” says the Rev. Abraham Booth, “either there is some other and a new rule given in its stead, or there is not. If *another*, it may be presumed, that it is *more* or *less* perfect, than that contained in the moral law. But *more* perfect it cannot be, without supposing that the old, the eternal law, was *imperfect*; to suppose which, is absurdly blasphemous. If it be *less* perfect, the consequence is plain. It is not a complete system of duty. It admits of imperfections. It connives at sin. But for any one to imagine that infinite wisdom would contrive, and that infinite holiness would give *such* a rule, for the conduct of rational creatures, is absolutely inconsistent with the divine character,

the apostle, "not to keep company, if any man that is a brother be a fornicator, or covetous, or an idolater, or a railer, or a drunkard, or an extortioner: with such an one, no not to eat." (1 Cor. v: 11.)

By the terms of the law, then, we are forbidden to worship idols. "Thou shalt have no other gods before me," saith the Lord, (Ex. xx: 3,) and this coincides with the apostolic decree, addressed to the gentile christians, from the council at Jerusalem: "that they should abstain from the pollutions of idols." (Acts, xv: 20.) By this command we are required to give to God the supreme place in all our affections, in all our purposes, in all our conduct. To love—to delight in—to desire—to expect good from any forbidden indulgence—to suffer any, the most valuable and excellent of creatures, to rival the Divine Being in our affections, is an infringement of this law—is to give the glory to the creature, and not to the Creator. Whensoever such condition of heart becomes manifest—whensoever it is admitted—whensoever it becomes the scandal of the church—it then calls for your action as promptly, and as loudly, as if images were set up in the house of the offender.

Profane swearing is also forbidden by the decalogue. "Thou shalt not take the name of the Lord thy God in vain: for the Lord will not hold him guiltless, that taketh his name in vain." (Ex. xx: 7.) This law is violated, by all that light, thoughtless and irreverent use of the titles and attributes of the Deity, which we hear in common conversation: and it requires that we abstain from their use, except in the most solemn and religious manner.

Again, the law demands, that one-seventh of our time be set apart to the exclusive worship of the great God: and although the wretched disregard of the Sabbath, in this country, would almost lead one to think it a virtue to violate this command, still, until it can be shown conclusively, when, and where, and how, the fourth commandment has been abrogated, we should continue to protest against such practices; and maintain, that *it* is not less binding upon us than

and pregnant with blasphemy. Such a rule, therefore, condemns itself, and sinks of its own weight. But if *not another*, then it follows, necessarily, that there is no rule to regulate the conduct of believers: they can neither obey nor disobey. Sin and duty are unmeaning names and empty words." (Death of Legal Hope, pp. 72, 73.)

the others among which it stands—and that the scandalous sin of transgressing *it*, is not less than is the transgressing the fifth, the sixth, the seventh and the eighth commandments. God is not man, that we may make our interests, our feelings, or our pleasure, a pretext for the violation of his law: and if such pretexts can be allowed in one case, we see not why they may not be allowed in any other. If, because our interest requires it, we may break the Sabbath, then, when our interest requires it, we may steal or tell a lie. If, because we feel like it, we may disregard the Lord's day, then, when we feel like it, we may kill, or commit adultery. If our pleasure can justify us in a violation of the fourth commandment, then, our pleasure will justify us in violating any law that God has given. No. To break the Sabbath is a crime—a crying sin—a scandal upon the church of God: and whether the offender can be reached by any authority, civil or ecclesiastical, still, it is a crime, which will not fail to meet condign punishment ere long.

The law, again, requires that children should honor their parents—that they attend to them when old and infirm—that they provide for them when poor and in distress—that they forbear to use to them any unkind or insulting language—that they obey them in every reasonable and just command. “Children obey your parents.” “Honor thy father and thy mother, which is the first command with promise.” “If any provide not for his own, and especially for those of his own house, he hath denied the faith, and is worse than an infidel.”* (Eph. vi: 1 Tim. v: 8.)

Another article of the law is, “thou shalt not kill.” (Ex. xx: 13.) Murder, fighting, quarreling, and causeless anger,

* It is because *this text* has been so wretchedly perverted and abused, that we ask the privilege to append the following note from the able pen of that inestimable prize essayist, the Rev. John Harris: “The sacred writer is giving directions relative to the maintenance of widows, and distinguishes between such as the church should relieve, and such as should be supported by their own relatives: and concerning the latter he makes the statement in question. Whence it follows, *first*, that the provision contemplated by the apostle, is not the laying up beforehand, for future contingencies, but a present supply of present necessities, a simple maintenance of needy relatives, from day to day. And *secondly*, that instead of countenancing parents in the accumulation of great fortunes for their children, is speaking of the maintenance, which children, if able, should afford to their aged and destitute parents. With the subject of *providing for families*, the text in question has nothing to do. Rightly interpreted, we see that it enjoins, not *accumulating* but *giving*.” (Mammon, p. 104.)

or anger cherished in the heart, are modes by which it is violated. "Whosoever is angry with his brother, is a murderer, and ye know that no murderer hath eternal life." (1 John, iii: 15.)

"Thou shalt not bear false witness against thy neighbor." "Lie not, one to another." "Speak every man the truth, with his neighbor." (Ex. xx: 16—Col. iii: 9—Eph. iv: 25.) Such also is the requisition of the law. It looks at perjury—at prevarication—at detraction—at deception. It forbids "double dealing"—it forbids dishonesty in our business transactions: it requires that we excite no expectations which we do not intend to satisfy—that we leave no impressions on the mind of another, which we will not comply with—to make no promises—no appointments, which we do not strive to fulfil. It is violated when these things are neglected. It is transgressed by neglecting to pay our debts, *if possible*: and to pay them punctually and promptly. No laws which Congress or any other authority can enact, can render just and honest, a refusal to pay any debt we may create, if we ever become able, by industry and economy, to do so. Congress may, if she pleases, pass "bankrupt laws," and men may avail themselves of them, and call it lawful; but we ask, what power has Congress to repeal the divine law, which still thundereth, "pay what thou owest." "Owe no man any thing." "See that no man go beyond and defraud his brother in any matter." (Rom. xiii: 8—1 Thes. iv: 6.)

Lewd and lascivious practices, in our intercourse one with another, are also forbidden by the decalogue. If these crimes are not so common among christian people, as some others, yet they have been too frequent, in some places of late, to be passed in entire silence. This was the leading sin of the Nicolaitanes, "which thing," said the Son of God, "I hate." Fornication and adultery are crying sins, which it behooves every christian and every good man, in the community, to frown down in the most uncompromising manner. Such offenders have no inheritance in the kingdom of heaven. "Therefore, put away that wicked person from among you." (1 Cor. v: 13.)

Drunkenness is another public offence, that must not pass unnoticed. "Drunkenness," said the excellent Andrew Fuller, "is a sin which involves in it, a violation of the

whole law, which requires love to God—to our fellow-men and to ourselves. The *first*, as abusing his mercies. The *second*, as depriving those who are in want of them, of the necessities of life, as well as of setting a bad example. The *third*, as depriving ourselves of reason—of self-respect—and common decency.” (On Gen. ix: 20-3.)

Idleness, laziness, neglect of business, is also a violation of the divine law. That law which requires us to do no work on the Sabbath, we nor our son, nor our daughter, nor our man-servant, nor our maid-servant, also commands that six days we shall work and do all our business. (Ex. xx: 9.) Under the new dispensation, the principle was repeated, thus: “Be not slothful in business.” (Rom. xii: 11.) It has been quaintly said, “an idle man’s brain is the devil’s work shop”—and every body knows the truth of the old adage, “idleness produces want, vice and misery.” Hence, in the apostolic style, to be an idler was to be “disorderly.” “We hear,” said he, “that there are some which walk disorderly among you, working not at all, but are busy bodies. Now, them that are such we command and exhort, that with quietness they work and eat their own bread.” (2 Thes. iii: 11, 12.) It is true the Bible does not define the particular employment which each must pursue. This is left to every man’s choice, and to every man’s necessities. But it does require that every man, adopting some honest and moral pursuit, should “be diligent in business.” “Let him labor, working with his hands, the thing which is good, that he may have to give to him that needeth.” (Eph. iv: 28.)

Once more: extortion is a public offence, which requires the act of excommunication. Extortion is to take advantage of a fellow-man’s necessities, and compel him to pay more than is lawful for money, or to part with his property for less than its value. It is to take of thy neighbor without giving him an equivalent for that which you receive. It is “to grind the face of the poor”—“to oppress him in his cause,” whether by usury or other means. The apostle says, “if there be a man who is a brother, and guilty of such an act, class him with idolaters, railers and drunkards, and have no company with him, no not to eat.” (1 Cor. v: 11.)

Such, then, are the public offences which the moral law, and the whole christian economy, regard as sinful. Which of them is there, which a religious man may commit, and

not bring scandal upon the cause of Christ? Is it idolatry? profanity? lying? stealing? murder? lewdness? dishonesty? drunkenness? extortion? Which is it, that is not disgraceful to the christian name? Mark them which cause such offences, contrary to the doctrine which ye have learned, and avoid them.

Nor is it necessary that all these sins should be found upon any one member of the church. If any one of them attach to his character, it is sufficient for all the purposes of discipline. Note how the apostle speaks: "I have written you not to keep company, if any man that is called a brother, be a fornicator, *or* covetous, *or* a railer, *or* a drunkard, *or* an extortioner, with such an one, no not to eat." This is the general style of the scriptures. When they enumerate the virtues necessary to christianity, they connect them by copulative conjunctions: but when they describe the vices to be avoided, they connect them by disjunctives. To be a good man, one must add all that is good in his composition: but to be a bad man, one evil is sufficient.

Nor is it even necessary that *one offence be habitual*. As in common life, *one criminal act* is enough to convict a man, so in religion. To kill once, to lie once, to get drunk once, to steal once, to commit any scandalous offence once, is sufficient to demand your action. The Bible no where rests the excommunication of a gross and willful transgressor, upon habitual wickedness. But throughout, it inculcates the sentiment of the text: "Mark them which cause divisions and offences, contrary to the doctrine which ye have learned, and avoid them: for they that are such serve not our Lord Jesus Christ."

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NO. 10.

PUBLIC OFFENCES, OR CHURCH DISCIPLINE :

A sermon, by Rev. A. W. CHAMBLISS, Tuskegee, Alabama.

NO. II.

"Now, I beseech you, brethren, mark them which cause divisions and offences, contrary to the doctrine which ye have learned, and avoid them : for they that are such serve not our Lord Jesus Christ."—ROM. XVI: 17, 18.

It has been said, that "it is the utility alone, of any moral rule, which constitutes the obligation of it." Although this may not be strictly true, either philosophically or morally considered, yet, the idea of utility ought not to be left out of the account. It is an important item in the calculation. This seems the sentiment of the apostle, in the text before us. Do you ask why we should sedulously "avoid" those who perpetrate the offences described in the preceding discourse? Do you inquire why we should separate them from our communion? We will tell you, the cause of Christ requires it—"they that are such serve not our Lord Jesus Christ."

It seems to have been a settled maxim in the mind of St. Paul, that *whoever was not decidedly beneficial to the cause of the Redeemer, was decidedly prejudicial to it*: that there is no middle ground which a man may occupy—that the church of Christ can better prosper without the encumbrance of an unholy member, than with it. The reason was, he regarded the maintenance of the principle which requires true piety in members of the church, as an indispensable desideratum. He felt that its success in the world, depended, not so much on human agency, as on the divine power: that it had favor with men, not so much because of the paraphernalia thrown round about it, as because the unseen arm of Almighty God rightly disposed the hearts of men towards it: and that, if we would propitiate the divine

favor, and secure the divine agency on our behalf, it must be done by carefully maintaining the spirit of piety in the church. And who has not seen this abundantly exemplified? Who has not seen the influence of even a solitary man of stern, uncompromising piety? Who has not witnessed the gradual, but steady enlargement of a small church, which was careful to avoid all evil? "The kingdom of heaven is like unto leaven, which a woman took and hid in three measures of meal until the whole was leavened." (Matt. xiii: 33.) Keeping free of alloys, its purifying influence will be onward and continuous, until "a small one shall have become a thousand, and a little one a great nation." The strength of the church does not consist in her numbers—nor in her wealth—nor in her talents—nor in any worldly accomplishments: but in the depth and fervency of her piety.

It is, perhaps, our weakness, that we are so apt to look at things in a different light: and to fancy our condition greatly improved by the addition, or greatly injured by the exclusion, of this man, or that, of influence in the world, although it is most evident, that he is not decidedly beneficial to the cause of Christ. Yes, we too frequently identify the abundance of what the church possesseth, with the very life and power of christianity. We suffer ourselves to feel too dependant on these things for success. The evil consequence is, we seize hold on all these with too much avidity, and hold on to them with too great tenacity. We receive almost all who apply for admission to our communion; and let none go, so long as the least possible pretext remains. Forgetting that a bad member will prove seriously injurious—"that a little leaven leaveneth the whole lump"—"that evil communications corrupt good manners," we sometimes cleave to those whom inspired wisdom cautions us to "mark" and "avoid," and that to the lamentable detriment of religion. "Now, I beseech you, brethren, mark them which cause divisions and offences, contrary to the doctrine which ye have learned, and avoid them: for they that are such serve not our Lord Jesus Christ."

I. We are in this discourse to inquire: "What is the discipline which the scriptures prescribe for public offenders?" And here permit us to remark, that the solution of this question must be sought, partly in the person: partly in the offence: and partly in the objects of discipline.

First. Who is the offender? This is the first question that bears on the mode of discipline—this is the first which the scripture rule would teach us to ask.

“*Omnibus paribus,*” that is, all things being equal, the scriptures recognize no distinctions between persons. But all things are not equal in the conditions of men. Religious servants have not the same opportunities to perform the duties required by religion, which their masters enjoy. Children in Christ, have not always the intelligence which their seniors possess. Wives are sometimes influenced by their husbands. Differences of education induce a liability to regard the same act in a different manner.

This inequality in the condition and circumstances of the different members of the same church, would render the same discipline, on some oppressive and intolerable, and on others, light and trifling. “Unto whomsoever much is given, of him shall much be required.” (Luke, xii: 48.) A neglect of his family, on the part of a religious master, would be a highly censurable offence: whereas, the same neglect on the part of the servant, should be treated with less severity. For a pious wife, or mother, to *frequently* remain from the house of God, might be excusable: but for the husband to do so, would be without excuse. An ignorant christian should frequently receive our pity, where one of intelligence should be seriously reproved. In all cases, therefore, let the age—the intelligence—the opportunities—and the condition of the offender, be calmly and deliberately considered. “And on some have compassion, making a difference: and others save with fear, pulling them out of the fire: hating even the garment spotted with the flesh.” (Jude, 22, 23.)

“The sum of our instructions on this subject, (says the Rev. Jos. S. Baker, than whom no man stands higher among us, as a writer,) appears to be this: that gross, willful and obstinate offenders, are to be promptly excluded from the church: while such as have been misled by them, and have sinned inadvertently—not through a settled purpose to do wrong, or any perverse disposition of the heart, but through the weakness of their frail natures and the infatuation of the moment—should be treated with greater lenity. If they are tractable and can be made sensible of their faults—if they are ingenuous enough to confess their faults, and honest enough, not only to reform their conduct, but

also to seek to make some adequate reparation for the wrongs they have done—they should be retained in the communion. But even in such cases, it is necessary that the church proceed in such a manner, as to clearly evince, that while she retained the offender in fellowship, she held his sin in utter abhorrence.” (Bap. Chronicle, vol. 1, no. 5.)

Secondly. The character of the offence should have an influence upon the mode of discipline.

If there is great inequality in the circumstances of different offenders, the dissimilarity in their crimes is still greater; and this renders necessary, a careful discrimination of the class of offences under consideration at any given moment. In all cases where the offensive act arose, not so much out of an evil intention, as out of some extraneous influence: as ignorance, erroneous education, &c.; or where the act concerns a thing about which the Bible is silent, and there may be a difference of private judgment: as in attending a ball, a theatre, a circus, playing at drafts, or playing on a violin; or where the act has been so common in the community, as hardly now to be esteemed a fault: as traveling on the Sabbath, or otherwise desecrating the Lord’s day—the neglect of the conference, or other days of public worship—the moderate use of ardent spirits, or the refusal to sustain a proper proportion of the church expenses; or where the evil consequences of the act may be easily remedied by a diligent use of the proper method: as in the case of false, or otherwise injurious doctrines, started in the congregation; or lastly, where the fault is so novel, and so unlikely to become common, as not soon to affect others: as in the case of idleness, neglect of parents, &c.,—in all such cases as these, the church should *first* labor to better instruct her members, and thus, if possible, to reclaim them. If by this means they are reformed, let the past be forgiven, and let the offender be retained in the communion. If, however, he refuse to receive instruction, let him be seriously rebuked before the whole church, for an obstinate persistence in a course which is at once injurious to the peace of God’s house, and derogatory to the cause of the Redeemer. If still he refuse, let the church proceed to *publicly* excommunicate him from the society of the faithful. “If he will not hear the church, let him be unto thee as an heathen man and a publican.” “An heretic, after the first or second

admonition, reject." "If any man consent not to wholesome words, even the words of our Lord Jesus Christ, and to the doctrine which is according to godliness, he is proud, knowing nothing: . . . from such withdraw thyself." "Them that sin rebuke before all, that others also may fear." (Matt. xviii: 17—Tit. iii: 10—1 Tim. vi: 3—5—ib. v: 20.)

You will, we hope, distinctly remark the class of offences which we have specified: for there is a different description of crimes, where a widely dissimilar mode of discipline is indispensably necessary. There are acts which are highly scandalous, and which every one the least familiar with the subject, is obliged to know are at variance with the whole spirit and genius of the christian religion. Murder, fighting, lying, stealing, drunkenness, adultery, and such like, are so palpably wrong, that no age—no education—no condition in life, can be pleaded as their excuse. Were it possible that the Bible should be blotted out of existence, and yet man be a christian: still he would know and feel that such practices are criminal. The implantation of the "divine nature" in the heart, is the obliteration of such feelings from the soul. The christian carries a heavenly monitor within, which reminds him that the opposite of such conduct is the path for his feet. There is no compromise between such acts and religion. They are the antipodes of each other. They are as irreconcilable as light and darkness. When, therefore, a man that is called a brother is detected in such scandalous offences, the church is called upon at once to express her decided, and most uncompromising detestation of them. Delays in such cases, and least of all, apologies, excuses and confessions, as are sometimes received, are unquestionably wrong and injurious. They are injurious to the offender, and to the cause of christianity: and at the same time a violation of the laws of Christ's kingdom, as laid down by the apostle. "Mark them which cause divisions and offences, contrary to the doctrine which ye have learned, and *avoid* them." "In the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, when ye are gathered together with my spirit, and the power of our Lord Jesus Christ, deliver such an one to satan for the destruction of the flesh." "I have written unto you not to keep company, if any man that is called a brother be a fornicator, or covetous, or an idolater, or a railer, or a drunkard, or an extortioner, with such an one, no not to eat." "There-

fore, put away from among you that wicked person." "Now I command you, brethren, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye withdraw yourselves from any brother that walketh disorderly, and not after the traditions which ye have received of us." "If any man obey not our word by this epistle, note that man, and have no company with him." (Rom. xvi : 17, 18—1 Cor. v : 4, 5, 11, 13—2 Thes. iii : 6, 11.)

Such are the words of an inspired apostle. They were uttered with divine authority, and with exceeding emphasis. And permit us to say, beloved brethren, they look with a frowning face upon much of our conduct in the discipline of the church. Do they afford any precedent for that tardiness which characterizes so much of our action? When the apostle says, with so great solicitude and tenderness, "in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, when ye are assembled with my spirit, and the power of our Lord Jesus Christ, deliver" the scandalous offender to "the kingdom of satan" in this world, did he intend that the church should meet and adjourn from week to week, and from month to month, and yet not exclude him from the communion? Or, when he so frequently commanded, exhorted and admonished, in the name and with the authority of the Lord Jesus, "to withdraw from,"—"to avoid,"—"to put away," and "have no company with the wicked person," did he mean that we should set all these laws aside with apologies, excuses, confessions, &c.? Is there in the context where any of these commands occur, a solitary word about apologies and such like? No : not one syllable.

We said, *that delays in the case of notorious scandals, are decidedly wrong and injurious* : and in this judgment we are sustained by our best authorities. John Angel James, whose "Church Member's Guide" has received so wide a circulation among us, says : "Where the crime is highly scandalous, and very notorious, it is necessary for the honor of religion—for the credit of the society—and for the good of the offender, to *proceed immediately to excommunication, as soon as the fact is proved.*" (p. 155.) In precise coincidence with this, is the direction laid down in the "Baptist Confession of Faith," to which we made a former reference. It says : "Where a member has been found guilty of some gross act of immorality, and which is noto-

rious and scandalous, *the church should proceed to this censure (excommunication,) in the first place, (i. e.) without the previous steps of admonition and reproof,* in order to vindicate the credit of their holy profession, and to manifest their abhorrence of such abominations." (p. 223.)

What language can be more to the point than this? It is perfectly plain and simple, and easy to be understood. It is the testimony of those whose praise is in all our churches, and it precisely harmonizes with the declaration of the apostle, that when we are *first* assembled after the perpetration of the act, "as soon as the fact is proved," "by the power of our Lord Jesus Christ," "put away that wicked person."

We said also, *that least of all should confessions, acknowledgments and hasty professions of repentance, be received as a satisfaction for public offences.* In this position also, we are supported by the judgment of the wise and the good. The language of the Rev. Jos. S. Baker, whose piety and ability entitle him to a high place in the confidence and affection of the churches, is: "This practice which is very prevalent, seems to us to savor of the Romish practice of forgiving sins, granting indulgences, &c. If there be any difference, we know not but that it is in favor of the Romanist: for he receives an actual compensation, something substantial, for the injury done his church: but we receive nothing but a wordy acknowledgment. We would have it established as a general principle in our churches, that every member guilty of public, scandalous offence, should be excluded, and kept out until he had sufficient time to evince the sincerity of his professions of penitence, and restore himself, in some degree at least, to the confidence of the community." (Bap. Chron. vol. 1, no. 6.)

To the opinion of Mr. Baker, let us add that of the Rev. Andrew Fuller, of England. The name of Mr. Fuller deservedly stands among the first authorities of the christian world. He was the Paul of modern times, and in all cases of question, we rejoice to have his judgment.

In 1779, Mr. F. wrote the "Circular Letter" for the Northamptonshire Association, on the "Discipline of the Primitive Churches," &c., which letter was published with the authority, and under the sanction of that body. From that "Circular," we extract the following language: "We cannot but consider it an error in the discipline of some

churches, where persons have been detected of gross and aggravated wickedness, that their exclusion has been suspended, and in many cases omitted, on the ground of repentance." "Allowing that repentance, in such cases is sincere, it is not of such account as to set aside the necessity of exclusion." "The end to be answered by this measure, is not merely the good of the party, but the clearing of a christian church from every appearance of conniving at immorality, which cannot be done by repentance only." (Fuller's Works, vol. 2, p. 466.)

Again: we ask what is proven by these authorities, from which no appeal will probably be made by any Baptist church? We have seen the most positive, emphatic and unqualified declaration of the apostle. To this we have added the judgment of the wise and the good, whose names are held in high and tender esteem among us—names brought from different centuries and from different countries, and all conspiring to prove the same, the identical point, viz: that the good of the offender and the credit of religion, demand an immediate exclusion of a public offender from the church: all concurring to say, do not postpone your action from week to week and from conference to conference: all concurring to say, that no apologies, excuses and repentance, however sincere, are a sufficient satisfaction for the injury done to the cause of Christ, by a public offence. Brethren, if we will not hear all these, neither would we be persuaded though one should arise from the dead. But,

Thirdly. The objects of church discipline must be allowed to have an influence upon its mode.

The discipline of the church is not a matter of whim and of caprice. As it rests on the divine authority, so it contemplates high and holy purposes. The good of the offender—the good of the innocent—and the honor of christianity, are the objects which it is to subserve.

It is designed to benefit the offender. Yes, we repeat it, it is to promote, not so much the momentary gratification—so much the short-lived worldly advantage—not so much the imaginary, as the real, the spiritual and eternal good of him, who has fallen into the snare of the devil. It is to teach him "not again to blaspheme"—it is "that the spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus." (1 Tim. i: 20—1 Cor. v: 5.)

The good of the innocent is another object which it contemplates. It is at the same time to be admonitory to those who are also in the flesh, and to deliver them from the infectious influence of a notorious transgressor. "Evil communications corrupt good manners." "Know ye not that a little leaven leaveneth the whole lump? Therefore, purge out the old leaven, that ye may be a new lump." "Them that sin rebuke before all, that others also may fear." (1 Cor. xv: 33—ib. v: 6—1 Tim. v: 20.)

We said also, that *the honor of religion generally must be sought in the discipline of the church.* This is, perhaps, the highest, as it certainly is the ultimate object which is to be secured by it. As the apostle said, "let God be true, but every man a liar:" so we say, let the honor of Christ's cause be secured, though every man on earth should stand condemned. This is to be "the alpha and omega, the first and the last," in all our actions. Since men are to form their estimate of religion, by the conduct of the church, "let your light so shine before them that they may see your good works, and glorify your father which is in heaven." "In all things *walk worthy of the Lord* unto all pleasing." (Matt. v: 16—Col. i: 10.)

Beloved brethren, it is impossible that we should impress this observation upon your minds with too much point or emphasis. We fear it is too frequently lost sight of, in our discipline. In our overweening anxiety for the offender, we sometimes fail to do what his real good, and the glory of the church require. When we throw open the doors of our communion to unworthy and scandalous workers—when, from motives of private friendship, of popularity or worldly advantage, we fellowship those who bring reproach upon the cause of Christ—those to whom the world can point as evil doers—those "disorderly walkers" who trample the laws of God and religion beneath their feet, do we in all this seek the good of the church and the honor of christianity? We fear it might sometimes be said of us, with too much propriety, "the name of God is blasphemed through you, as it is written."

Let no one imagine, that we are not to be influenced in our action, by what the world will say or think. This might be so, if public sentiment were opposed to religion—and if men were to speak against you falsely, for righteous-

ness' sake. "It is praise-worthy if a man, for conscience toward God, endure grief, suffering wrongfully. But what glory is it, if when ye be buffeted for your faults, ye shall take it patiently." If the church of God shall faithfully discharge her duty, and this shall be the occasion of maltreatment from the world, let her rejoice—let her not care for it. But no such indifference is justifiable where duty is neglected: and least of all, may such indifference be pleaded as a pretext for the neglect of duty. Where the whole moral tone of society is in favor of religion, and where every man, if from no other consideration, than because his parents and friends are its members, supports and advocates the cause of pure religion and the church, it cannot be right to disregard public sentiment. In fact, if as a church we may do so, then we may, in like manner, as individuals. Nay, it is infinitely worse, in our church actions, to condemn the opinions of the public, than to do so as individuals: because, in the one case, we act in a private capacity: while in the other, we do so as a public, organized body. When men, as individuals, act, they do so upon their own private responsibility: but when they act as a church, they do so upon the responsibility of religion—of the Bible—and, (if I may so say,) upon the responsibility of God and of heaven. It is because we act in the name, and under the authority of our Lord Jesus Christ, that it is said, "whatsoever ye shall bind on earth shall be bound in heaven: and whatsoever ye shall loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven." (Matt. xvi: 19.) It is this which gives such weight—which gives such awful sacredness to the actions of a church. It is this which renders circumspection on the part of the church, so infinitely momentous—it is this that gives eternal weight to the apostolic exhortation, "walk worthy of the Lord unto all pleasing." Shall our responsibilities be abused? Shall the authority vested in us, be employed to sanction that which God has forbidden? Shall we, clothed upon with the vestments of divinity, connive at sin? Shall we, in the habiliments of the great God, wink at iniquity? Shall we so act that men shall not see the distinction between the good and the evil—that men shall regard sin to be only a trifle? It does appear to us, that, if in the world of despair, there be one place deeper and more wretched, than any other, it must be the appointment of that church which shall so abuse the divine authority. No, brethren:

let us ever remember, that when in the capacity of a church we act, we are called upon by every consideration of reason and religion, *so to act*, as to honor the cause of Christ in the world.

From the objects of church discipline, which we have stated, we learn: *First, that great tenderness should be used towards the offender.* We do not mean by tenderness, that effeminate weakness, which cringes and shrinks from a faithful discharge of duty: but the faithful performance of duty, in a mild, gentle and affectionate manner. Love, on the one hand, prompts to fidelity: and on the other, checks rashness and precipitancy. It forbids us to accuse and condemn without sufficient evidence: but when this is produced, requires that we dispose of the offence according to the law of righteousness. It cautions us not to provoke to resentment, or drive to despair, him whom we would save: but while we would censure the offence, to do it in such a manner as to evince that we love him who hath done wrong. "Let us not do evil that good may come." Let us be guilty of no wrong ourselves, while we would correct it in another. Let us bear in mind, that he is a brother, perhaps a truly converted man, but in this instance, *unfortunately, guilty.* Let us not seek his destruction, but his timely restoration: and let meekness and gentleness characterize our whole action. The maxim of St. Paul, to his "son Timothy," affords a delightful rule in all such cases: "The servant of the Lord must not strive: but be gentle unto all men, apt to teach, patient; *in meekness* instructing those that oppose themselves; if God peradventure will give them repentance to the acknowledging of the truth; and that they may *recover* themselves out of the snare of the devil, who are taken captive by him at his will." (2 Tim. ii: 24, 5, 6.)

Another lesson, suggested by the objects of discipline, is, *that it must be conducted in perfect concert on the part of the church.* It is not the business of one man, or of two men: it not the business of the pastor, nor the pastor and deacons conjointly, to transact such important affairs of the house of God. It is the business of the church, the whole church. The duty is equally imperative on one, as on any other: on all, as on any, to see to it, that "the old leaven be purged from the lump"—to see to it, that "the wicked person be put away" from the body. No man may, from

a mere indisposition to act—no man may, from feelings of delicacy—no man may, from considerations of private friendship, of interest or popularity—no man may, from motives of moral cowardice and fear, neglect to co-operate with his brethren. There is no excuse which can be pleaded for a neglect of duty in this place, which would not prove fatal if admitted as a principle. If the good of the offender, and the glory of God, are reasons sufficient to justify any one in a prompt and decided action, they are sufficient to justify all; and if any worldly consideration is a proper excuse for one, it is no less so for every one. But least of all, are parties to be admitted for or against the offender. To bring private animosities, or private advocacies, into the discipline of the church, would be to subvert all order and all rule—would be to subvert all the beneficial purposes which it contemplates. That moment it ceases to promote the good of the offender—the good of the innocent—or the glory of God: that moment the church ceases to be the habitation of order, and harmony, and love: and becomes the theatre of strife, and malice, and ill-will. In the language of the Rev. Mr. Fuller: “Beware, brethren, of both these extremes, which, instead of assisting us in our work, would be doing the utmost to counteract us. We may almost as well abandon discipline entirely, as not to act in concert.” (Works, vol. 2, p. 474.)

Again: we are taught by the objects of discipline, *to observe the strictest impartiality in all our actions*. In the church, we are to “know no man after the flesh.” (2 Cor. v: 16.) “There is neither Jew nor Greek; there is neither bond nor free; there is neither male nor female; but all are one in Christ Jesus.” (Gal. iii: 28.) Here all are alike—here all stand on equal footing—here all have equal rights and privileges. In the church of God, we are to know neither father nor mother; neither husband nor wife; neither son nor daughter; neither brother nor sister. (Deut. xxxiii: 9.) As no man should fear he will be condemned, if he remain innocent: so no one should expect he will go free, if he commit transgression. No one is too high, and no one is too low—no one is too honorable, and no one is too dishonorable, to avoid censure, if he be guilty of sin against the laws of Christ. No age—no position in society—no sex—no condition in life, can throw sanctity enough

around the offender to cover his sin, or protect him in it. The rich and the poor, the male and the female, the white man and the black, the old and the young, are all alike amenable for their acts; and pursuing the proper method in their arraignment and trial, should receive the same treatment. We may bear with none, where we would not bear with all; and we should condemn none, where we would not condemn all. To depart from this rule, also, is to destroy all the beneficial effects of church discipline. It then ceases to be a terror to the innocent, or to be a punishment for transgression. Nay, it then ceases to promote the good of the church, or the glory of God.

But once more: The objects of church discipline require, that *the excommunicating act be pronounced against the offender publicly, (i. e.) in the presence of the whole congregation.* Excommunication is a recognition of gross and aggravated wickedness, in the actions of church members: and is at the same time, the church's censure of such criminality. If, then, the honor of christianity is a sufficient reason why we should censure the offence at all, it is a no less sufficient reason why we should censure it publicly. "Let your light so shine *before men*, that they may see your good works and glorify your father which is in heaven." (Matt. v: 16.)

The language of the "Baptist Confession of Faith," on this subject, is: "If the offence be private, the censure may, and in some cases ought to be laid on before the church only: but *if the crime is public and very notorious, the honor of Christ calls for the censure to be public.*" (p. 156.) This, too, is the judgment of the Presbyterian church. In the "Form of Government for the Presbyterian church of the United States, adopted by the General Assembly, in Philadelphia, A. D. 1840," we have the following decision: "When any member has been adjudged to be cut off from the communion, *it is proper that the sentence be publicly pronounced against him.*" (p. 122.) To these authorities, from the "Baptist" and "Presbyterian" churches, let us add one from the "Methodist" church. Says Dr. Martin Ruter, of the Methodist Episcopal church, "from the Historical Works of Dr. Gregory," of the Church of England: "*Ecclesiastical censures*, (in the 2nd cent.,) which are so necessary for the honor—the order—and even the preserva-

tion of the regular society, *were publicly denounced against the offender*, who had relapsed into idolatry, or fallen into gross sin." (History of the Church, p. 43.)

Such, then, is the concurrent judgment of all the leading denominations of christians, in this country. Let it be distinctly remembered, that the two former are from "official documents," and that the last, while it is both Methodist and Episcopal authority, is at the same time, evidence adduced from the practice of the churches in the first ages—the practice of Ignatius, Polycarp and Justin Martyr, who received the management of the affairs of the house of God, at the hands of the apostles. If to such accumulated testimony, any thing more is necessary, to give *divine authority* to this practice, it is only the apostolic command which we have so frequently quoted, "*them that sin rebuke before all, that others also may fear.*" (1 Tim. v: 20.)

Is it difficult, beloved brethren, to see what influence this practice would have upon the objects contemplated by the discipline of the church? Do we seek the good of the offender? How can this be secured, but by annexing such penalty to transgression as shall at once impress his mind with the magnitude of crime, and at the same time humble his proud and rebellious spirit under it? Do we seek the good of the innocent? How can this be secured but by throwing the terrors of a public censure before them? Do we seek the honor of christianity? Then let all men see distinctly, that "we have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather reprove them." (Eph. v: 11.) When this practice shall be rigidly pursued in the case of notorious and public offences; if men become more careful how they connect themselves with the church; they will be, also, much more careful how they act after they have joined it.

What objection then can there be alledged against it? Is it novel? No. We have seen that it was practised in the early ages of christianity. Is it without divine authority? No. We have seen the apostolic declaration in regard to it. Is it peculiar to us? No. We have seen that Presbyterian, Methodist and Episcopalian authorities all sustain it. Will it be injurious? No. We have seen that it will subserve all the beneficial purposes of church discipline.

It is a great, a pitiable weakness of ours, beloved brethren,

when we fear to do our duty, lest it should be injurious. What have we to do with such consequences as that? Duty is ours; consequences belong to God. To adopt again the language of Mr. Fuller: "with regard to the neglect of discipline, lest it should *injure the cause*; what cause must that be, which requires to be thus supported? Be it our concern to obey the law of Christ, and leave him to support his own cause. If it sink by a fulfilment of his commandments, let it sink. He will not censure us for not supporting the ark with unhallowed hands." (Works, vol. 2, p. 465.) Seek the will of God in the scriptures; in the practice of the apostolic churches; in the judgment of the wise and the good; and faithfully discharge it; fear no evil. "God's ways are not as our way; and God's thoughts are not as our thoughts." He will accomplish his purposes only by his own ways. Be faithful and he will do it. "Now I beseech you, brethren, mark them which cause divisions and offences contrary to the doctrine which ye have learned, and avoid them: for they that are such serve not our Lord Jesus Christ."

From the principles stated and advocated in these discourses, we deduce the following reflections:

It is an error in our discipline, that we look not so much at the general, as at the particular bad consequences, of the conduct of church members. We regard them as individuals, and their actions as isolated, instead of considering that a principle is involved in every instance. The particular bad consequence of overlooking any of the offences which we have specified, may be a trifling matter: but this cannot be done in a solitary case, without being done in every case, except upon the principle of partiality; and then it becomes disastrous and fatal. To permit one member to speak contemptuously of the doctrines and practices of the church—or to detract from the standing and influence of the pastor—or to neglect the conference or other days of public worship, might be, so far as his case extends, a comparative trifle: but it cannot be allowed in one without being allowed in all; and who can estimate the evil which would then result? Hence, the force of the rule we have stated, viz: "We should bear with none where we would not bear with all." We should allow no conduct, in any case, which we would not allow in every case. Whatever we should con-

demn in all, we should condemn in any. Whatever would be injurious and destructive, if permitted as a general thing, is too injurious in a particular case to pass unnoticed.

Again, it is an error in our discipline, that we have too few criminal laws. That is to say, we regard too few things worthy of the censure of the church. Disregarding the apostolic injunction, "now I command you, brethren, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye withdraw yourselves from every brother that walketh disorderly, and *not after the tradition* which ye have received of us." (2. Thes. iii: 6.) "*If any man consent not to wholesome words*, even the words of our Lord Jesus Christ, and to the doctrine which is according to godliness, from such withdraw thyself." (1. Tim. vi: 3, 5.) Overlooking these directions, we have decreed by our usages, that no man is to be excommunicated, except for most notorious and aggravated wickedness; nor even then, except upon certain sweeping conditions. Although it is most manifest that his general deportment is most unlovely; that his influence is in no wise favorable to the cause of religion, if he avoid certain specific scandals, he is to be retained a deathly incubus upon the vitals of the church. This is decidedly an error. It was a sufficient reason with the apostle, why we should "avoid" a man, that he "served not our Lord Jesus Christ."

Again, it is an error, that we place too many acts, which are criminal in themselves, under the head of acts indifferent. Indifferent acts, it will be recollected, we have said, are such as a man may either perform, or let alone, and still be innocent. They are such as the Bible neither commands nor forbids: and which have no criminality in them, except when they occasion injury to others. This, however, cannot be said of Sabbath breaking—of covetousness—of extortion—of neglect of the church—neglect of family piety—the habitual use of ardent spirits—a refusal to support the gospel, &c. In all such cases there is a moral and religious obligation resting upon every church member. They are commanded by the Bible, and enforced by considerations of an eternal character. To regard such acts as indifferent; to say to all our brethren, you may either do them or let them alone; to hold no man accountable for the violation of the numerous passages of scripture where they are taught, is unquestionably an error, a grievous error. It is to recind

very many commands of the great God. To do such things is not to serve our Lord Jesus Christ.

Another error is, that we observe too much ceremony and formality with notorious offenders. However scandalous may be their sin, our custom is never to touch the case until the next regular conference. If then, perchance, he is not there, "a committee must be appointed to cite him to appear at the next, &c." And sometimes through divers causes, the case receives not the action of the church for months. It is impossible, brethren, that we should express, the deep sense of pain which we feel at the recognition of this error in the churches. Such custom had no existence in primitive times. Says Mosheim, the historian, "*It is worthy of particular notice, that the custom of excluding bad characters from the society of christians, was at first a simple process, or attended with very little formality.*" (Vol. 1, p. 160.) It was a short work. "As soon as the fact was proved;" when they were first assembled after the commission of the offence, he was excluded.

Another error is, that of pardoning a public offender, on the ground of repentance. In addition to what has been said on this subject, allow us to instance one other authority from the history of the church in the first ages. Dr. Ruter, says, "whatever the excuses of the public offender might be, he was deprived of every part in the oblation; avoided by the whole church; and excluded from the assemblies of the faithful. In vain did he implore even for *re-admission* into the society, until by a public confession of his sins, he had given solemn assurances of his intention to conform to the christian laws, and undeniable proofs of the sincerity of his repentance." (His. of Ch., p. 43.)

Again, it is an error that we do not act with sufficient concert. To say nothing of the want of uniformity in the discipline of different churches, by which circumstance we greatly enfeeble each other: and to say nothing of the occasional culpable interference of members of other churches in their private capacity, by which the good effects of discipline are sometimes lost: it frequently happens, that squeamishly sensitive members of the same church remain from the conference, lest they should be compelled to act in what they feel to be a painful case: others again remain silent, lest they should be thought to act against the offender: and

others still, as though nothing had taken place, carry it so freely toward the offender, even after the action of the church has been had, as to render the censure of none effect. Those persons, says the excellent Andrew Fuller, who behave in this manner, will be considered by the party as his friends, and those who stand aloof, as his enemies, or at least as being unreasonably severe; which will work confusion, and render void the best and most wholesome discipline. We must act in concert, or we had as well do nothing. Members who violate this rule, says he, are partakers of other men's sins, and deserve the rebukes of the church for counteracting her measures. (*Works*, vol. 2, 465.) But,

Finally: it is an error, that we are not sufficiently strict in our discipline. We allow too many things to pass unnoticed. As the strength and success of an army depend largely upon the strict and systematic discipline which it observes—as the health and prosperity of the body, require a strict and careful regimen—as the order and happiness of the community demand a close and vigilant observance of the laws and regulations prescribed for the government of its members: so the strength and success—the health and prosperity—the order and happiness of the church, call upon us to have a strict and constant watch over the deportment of all its members. “Now I beseech you, brethren, mark them which cause divisions and offences contrary to the doctrine which ye have learned, and avoid them.”

Beloved brethren, the reason for this injunction, is peculiarly pertinent and impressive. “For they that are such serve not our Lord Jesus Christ.” The Apostle, with exceeding jealousy, seemed to watch the principle which had been laid down long before by his blessed master. “He that is not with me, is against me; and he that gathereth not with me, scattereth abroad: (*Math. xii: 30* :) and he reasoned logically upon the ultimate bearings of a man's influence upon the cause of Christ. He never seemed to think that every name that could be added to the church book, was so much clear gain; and that every name blotted out, was so much dead loss to that best of causes. He seemed to consider, that the abolishment of the principle, which required true piety, as an indispensable condition in members of the church, would prove more fatal in the end, to the cause of the Redeemer, than the present advantages,

derived from the retention of a bad member would be worth. When he contemplated a man in connection with the church, he did not look at his influence for this year, or for this congregation alone; but he looked at his influence for life; and as it bore upon the principle which requires all church members to be holy, unblamable and unreprouvable, I fancy he reasoned thus: "If he is admitted or retained in the communion, it is true he will do something fine, so far as the size of the congregation is concerned; or so far as building a meeting house, or supporting the pastor goes: and on the contrary if he is turned out, we shall lose all this, and perhaps have a great deal to suffer from his excited spleen. But, then, if he is retained, it must be at the sacrifice of what is most vital and dear to the cause of Christ; at the sacrifice of the principle of piety in the church. The consequence will be, that we shall eventually have a church full of men, professing to be christians, but really not so. Either there will be none pious, or those who are will go off and set up anew. What now shall I do? Why, I will mark them which cause divisions and offences contrary to the doctrine which I have learned, and avoid them: because they that are such serve not our Lord Jesus Christ."

Allow us to enforce it upon your minds, beloved brethren that when you receive a member into the church, or when you retain one, to ask yourselves this question: not how far it will affect our list of names; not how far it will promote some sectarian purpose; or subserve some ambitious design: but how far it will advance the cause of Christ. How much of the salt of true piety; how much of the savor of godliness does he bring with him. He may have a name; he may have a family; he may have wealth; he may have influence in the world: and if to these he add piety, rejoice and be exceeding glad, that so much is sanctified to the Redeemer. But if the piety is wanting, he will be a dangerous acquisition. By how great may be his influence, if this is not for Christ—if it is against him—by so much will he prove rather a curse than a blessing. I tell you, my brethren, the apostle looked at this subject with inspired wisdom, when he said, "mark them which cause divisions and offences contrary to the doctrine which ye have learned, and avoid them: because they that are such serve not our Lord Jesus Christ."

THE APOSTLES WERE MISSIONARIES.

Deplorable, indeed, was the state of the world when the apostles, in the name of the Lord Jesus, commenced their holy labors. The nations were sunk in the depths of idolatry the most gross, and of superstition the most abominable. The gods, they professed to adore, varying in power and office, and restricted to particular elements or nations, were exhibited in lights too human, too fallen, to secure from degradation and neglect the common dictates of morality. Mysteries were cherished too obscene for description. The heavenly orbs and departed heroes were worshipped with extravagant honours; and the absurd religion of pagan Rome was spread through the nations which her arm had vanquished. Religious observances, if they deserve the name, originated in the policy of States, as with the Egyptians and Persians; or in an appetite for war, as with the Celts, the Germans, the Britons, and the Goths. If into the popular mythology a supreme deity were admitted, his character was dishonored by his committing the foulest offences, and his authority ever considered as contrrollable by an eternal *necessity*.

For removing these evils the efforts of philosophers were feeble and unavailing. If occasionally they presented sublime ideas, more frequently they offered notions too subtle for general comprehension, or too absurd to secure belief. Some doubted whether gods existed at all; others supposed the doctrine of the immortality of the soul a fable; and a third class represented it as uncertain whether vice or virtue were more favorable to the best interests of man. The philosophers themselves were corrupted; and it were as vain to expect that corruption would purify itself, as that a fountain should rise higher than its source.

But "after that, in the wisdom of God, the world by wisdom knew not God, it pleased God by the foolishness of preaching, to save them that believe." The apostles went forth without wealth, without arts, without influence. Sustained by divine qualifications, by the force of truth, and by the spirit of Christ, they accomplished wonders, which in

the history of our race are without a parallel. Unassuming in their manners, plain in their attire, with the idiom of Galilee, they were sent as sheep into a forest of wolves. The prejudices of the Jew, the craft of the heathen priesthood, the policy of rulers, and the bigotry of the people, were in array against them. It is said that in the arsenal of Bremen there are twelve pieces of cannon, which are called the twelve apostles, as if to insinuate that by such means men are to be convinced. But the apostles of Christ knew nothing of weapons that are carnal. They employed such only as are mighty through God. To their hearers they could promise no earthly emoluments and honors. Contempt, persecution, confiscation, banishment, martyrdom, attended an acceptance of the gospel. Yet modest, fearless, incessantly they pursued their course, gloriously turning the world upside down, until Rome, the arbitress of the nations, bowed to the doctrine of the Cross. They preached the gospel on the very soil which had been stained by the blood of their master; entered the largest cities, disputed with the most insidious and malignant adversaries, and loved not their lives even unto the death.

Little more than a century had passed, when Justin Martyr declared, "there is not a nation, either of Greek or Barbarian, or of any other name, even of those who wander in tribes and live in tents, amongst whom prayers and thanksgivings are not offered to the Father and Creator of the universe, by the name of the crucified Jesus." Tertullian, who succeeded Justin, says: "We were but of yesterday, and we have filled your cities, islands, towns and boroughs, the camp, the senate, and the forum." This victory of holy truth was the more surprising, inasmuch as the apostles and their fellow christians were everywhere calumniated. They were represented as enemies to government. Earthquakes, pestilences, calamities of any kind, were ever charged on them, and considered as indicating the anger of the gods that such monsters as christians were permitted to live. Because they worshipped without temples, images, priests and sacrifices, they were contemplated as a *class of atheists*, and such as killed them imagined themselves rendering a public service.

Had Mahomet, with his followers, been called to conflict with difficulties such as the apostles surmounted, his religion

could never have prevailed. It must have been blasted in its bud. With all the advantages which family connections, riches, assuasive manners, and courtly policy supplied him, only fourteen followers were the fruit of the first three years of his mission. The labor of seven years scarcely augmented his disciples to the number of a hundred. Perceiving no possibility of advancing his religion and reputation by the tedious process of persuasion, in the thirteenth year of his mission he declared that he had received an order from heaven to propagate the doctrines of the Koran by the terrors of the sword. To these he had recourse, and his system spread in proportion to his victories. To become Christians, was to become exposed to "deaths oft,"—to become a Mahomedan, was to avoid them.—*Lat. Day Lum.*

"Touch me not, for I am not yet ascended to my Father."—JOHN XX: 17.

This translation supposes the body of Christ will be more susceptible of touch in heaven, than on earth after his resurrection; or that to touch him before his ascension was improper: neither of which can be true. The word *aptomai*, means not only to touch, but to lay hold of, to embrace, to cling to. With such a translation, the passage is beautiful and affecting. "Do not cling to me; you will have other opportunities to embrace me; for I am not yet ascended; my brethren are anxious respecting my fate, go to them and announce that I am risen.—*Ibid.*